

GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Read the Bible in a Year Challenge
Week 8

Monday	Numbers 4-5	Psalm 41	Mark 15
Tuesday	Numbers 6-8	Psalm 42	Mark 16
Wednesday	Numbers 9-11	Psalm 43	Luke 1
Thursday	Numbers 12-14	Psalm 44	Luke 2
Friday	Numbers 15-17	Psalm 45	Luke 3
Saturday	Numbers 18-20	Psalm 46	Luke 4

Sunday: *Enjoy the lessons from Scripture as they are read aloud in Sunday worship. The Bible study summary for each Sunday of the year is found as a separate document on the parish website, under “Adult Education, Bible Study”.*

The Numbers readings:

1. See the summary for Week 7 for an introduction to Numbers.
2. The readings this week begin with the conclusion of the census of the tribes of Israel (ch. 4), proceed through the preparations for pilgrimage (which focus on cultic purity of camp and community, as described in chs. 5-10), and proceed into narrative of the wandering in the wilderness of Sinai, to the plains of Moab (chs. 10-20).
3. Ch. 4 includes the census of Levites, and a description of their duties. An important function of the Levites is to protect the people from dangerous exposure to God’s holiness (*e.g.*, the Ark of the Covenant).
 - a. The story of Hobab and the Ark (10.29-36) makes clear that interfering with the rules (even from a helpful motive) brings dire consequence.
 - i. The priests and Levites “bear the iniquity,” in protecting the people from God. They are able to do this because God has set them aside to do this (*see* ch. 18).
 - b. Much of the narrative in Numbers is from the Priestly source (P), and therefore focused on rituals of purity (*see, e.g.*, the ritual involving a red heifer, described in ch. 19).
4. Ch. 6 includes the description of the vows of Nazirites, a caste of those set aside for specific dedication to God. The vows include specific regulations about ritual purity, which become important in the story of Samson (Judges 13-16), since his vow is broken when his hair is cut.
5. The Israelites are accompanied in the wilderness by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. The LORD is present with His people.
 - a. Despite God’s physical presence, and despite His provision of water (at Meribah, 20.1-13), the people continue to murmur against Moses and God.
 - b. Each time the people express a diminution in faith, God provides, and yet the people continue to murmur.
 - i. Throughout the narrative the people rebel against Moses, and even (as in chs. 13-14) against God, proposing to reject the promised land and return to Egypt!

1. Moses and Aaron must intercede with God, to quiet His wrath (ch. 14).
 2. Matters come to a head with a full-fledged revolt described in ch. 16.
6. At Num. 13.33, the *nephilim* are referred to as dwelling in Canaan. See Gen. 6.1-4 for an account of the offspring of “the sons of God” with human women, before the flood.
- a. The root of the *nephilim*, *npl* means “fallen ones” in Hebrew. The concept is of fallen angels and offspring, but the Numbers account refers to them as giants. This points to the account being a later (P) interpolation, which is concerned with the language of Gen. 6.1-4 (a J document?), which can be read from a *linguistic* viewpoint to refer to giants.
 - i. This may be an example of a later biblical writer being literal with the record of an earlier writer, with unintended result.

The psalms: *The psalm numbering and versification system used throughout these study summaries is that found in The Book of Common Prayer (1979).*

1. The psalms encountered this week include:
 - a. 41: In the style of a Wisdom psalm, beginning with a didactic section, followed by the lament of one sick and abandoned, and a final expression of confidence in God’s saving power.
 - i. The reference to a “deadly thing” in v. 8 is made using language found elsewhere to refer to a malignant disease.
 - b. 42: This psalm and Ps. 43 were originally probably one psalm (a lament). This can be seen in the refrain found at 42.6, 12 and 43.5, and in other parallels (*e.g.*, 42.10 and 43.2).
 - i. The opening line has been famously set to music, *e.g.*, by Palestrina and Howells. In a musical setting the translation from the King James Bible (AV) is most often found, “Like as the hart desireth the watered brook ...”
 - c. 43: See above. “Light” and “truth” are personified at v. 3, as attendants in the courts of the LORD.
 - d. 44: A communal lament which begins with a confession of faith (vv. 2-9). A similar sequence of confession followed by lament is found in Ps. 89.
 - e. 45: A royal wedding hymn, considered to be very ancient and having a number of obscurities.
 - i. The first line (in the AV translation) is famous from a coronation anthem written by G. F. Handel, and used at the coronation of British monarchs: “My Heart is Inditing”.
 - ii. The reference to an eternal throne (v. 7) in connection with the king may reflect the ancient Near Eastern tradition of royal divinity. In this respect, the language reflects a non-Jewish cultural importation.
 - f. 46: This is the first of the hymns extolling Zion. The psalm forms the basis for Martin Luther’s famous chorale “A Mighty Fortress is Our God”.
 - i. As in most ancient Near Eastern thinking, the psalm contrasts chaos with divine order (the peaceful city).

The Gospel readings:

Mark

1. Ch. 15 of Mark contains much compressed detail of Jesus' trial first before the High Priest and then before Pilate, and of His crucifixion and death.
 - a. Throughout Mark it is outsiders who recognize who Jesus is. This motif reaches its climax at the crucifixion, when the Roman centurion in the execution party is the one who says, "Truly, this man was the Son of God!" (Mk. 15.39).
2. Jesus is executed under Roman law, under the charge that He has claimed to be king, *i.e.*, to have challenged the rule of the emperor.
 - a. Mark presents the Temple authorities as the prime movers in Jesus' condemnation, but the Romans as the actual agents of His death. This account may reflect an early Christian apologetic approach that sought to de-emphasize the Roman responsibility and shift blame to the Jewish authorities.
 - i. The early Christians sought favor with Rome. Mark was written about the time of the first organized persecution, and was written in Rome.
 - b. Pontius Pilate was Roman prefect in Judaea from A.D. 26 to 36.
 - i. The gospel accounts are more sympathetic to Pilate than are contemporary Roman accounts, which portray him as known for cruelty.
 1. Pilate's headquarters were at Caesaria Maritima (near modern Haifa). He came to Jerusalem to supervise the policing of the Passover pilgrimage.
 - ii. There is no extra-biblical account of the tradition of a single prisoner being released at Passover.
 1. Barabbas would have been just the kind of prisoner the Romans would *not* have wanted to release. His name is obscure, literally meaning "the son of the father".
3. Jesus is scourged. This involved being whipped with a many tailed whip of leather, with bits of bone, glass or metal in the leather tips. The process removed much skin, and caused significant blood loss. It was designed to so weaken the condemned that he would die quickly on the cross.
 - a. Wine is mingled with myrrh due to the narcotic effect of the myrrh.
4. Mark's account ends very quickly. The entire gospel was probably intended to be read aloud, at once sitting. Therefore, the text tradition that Mark ends at 16.8 (with 16.9-20 being a later addition) can be seen to emphasize that the focus now shifts to the listener, to the *disciple*.
 - a. In English 16.8 ends "... for they were afraid." In the Greek original the ending would have been on the preposition *gar* ("for," "because").
 - i. Imagine the "storyteller" ending here and looking at the audience. The action now shifts to the believer!

Luke

1. Luke's gospel likely dates from the ninth decade. It reflects knowledge of the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70) but not of the persecutions of Christians from the latter years of the rule of Domitian (who ruled A.D. 81-96), and none of the disputes between Christians and the synagogue following the Pharisaic reforms of Judaism (A.D. 85-90).

- a. Luke is identified from New Testament sources as a Greek-speaking physician, probably a Syrian from Antioch (where believers first called themselves “Christians”).
 - i. His Greek is much more sophisticated than that of the other gospel writers.
 - ii. He likely wrote his gospel in Achaia (in Greece) or in Rome.
 - iii. Acts is the second book of one work, with the gospel being the first book.
 - iv. Luke states that he researched sources; that he was not an eyewitness (Lk. 1.1-4; Acts 1.1-3).
2. Luke clearly relies on Mark as a source. He also shares another source with Matthew.
 - a. This second, common source is referred to by scholars as Q (from the German word for source, *quelle*), and probably reflects an oral tradition in the community of believers.
 - b. Luke also has a source unique to his account. Church Tradition has long held this to be testimony deriving from the Virgin Mary.
3. Luke is addressed to a predominantly Gentile audience. Nonetheless, he emphasizes a continuity between the Church and the Jewish Law.
 - a. Luke’s depiction of Jesus emphasizes Christian belief as a fulfillment of the Law.
 - i. Nonetheless, he does not uphold any strict “entrance requirements” into the Church.
 - ii. Luke has a special regard for the poor and for women. These “outcasts” play a significant role in the reconstituted Israel depicted by Luke.
 - b. Jesus is depicted as a prophet of God’s justice and His mercy. In the fully divine Jesus, God unites the two.
 - i. Unlike in Mark, the people are not depicted as blind and stubborn. They are able to form a bond of community.
4. Luke’s infancy narrative is set as a depiction of God’s fulfillment of His promise of election and salvation. Hence, the emphasis on the fulfillment of prophecy (*e.g.*, as found in the stories of Zechariah and Simeon).
 - a. John the Baptist’s preaching is of the fulfillment of prophecy, with the prophecy being fulfilled in Jesus.